

- **Hurricane evacuation, pay, safe haven, per diem for New Orleans District employees**

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As a whole, hurricanes do a pretty good job of distributing work across everybody's desk. Some folks get work on day one, some folks get in on the work a day or two or later. There are a few lucky folks who get hurricane work even before the hurricane comes. This is one of those situations.

The following are guides and information to help inform and prepare you for what, may be your work situation in the event of a hurricane or hopefully, what never occurs again, an evacuation.

What's the difference?

--Closing the district

--Evacuating the district

--State or local government evacuation orders

These will drive the whole process.

Closing the District will be the norm. When the Commander closes the District, it is just that, the District is closed. Unless specifically authorized by name, no employee is allowed on the reservation. Employees are sent home. When employees are sent home during a work day or the District remains closed during the employee's normal work hours/days the employee is placed in an

Administrative Pay status. No other pay, travel or per diem allowances are payable. Generally, closing the District will last no more than a few days. Monitor, the web page <http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil> or call the following numbers for information on the District's work status.

District's Main Number: 1-800-362-3412 (message)

USACE Toll Free number: 1-800 522-5874

Crisis Management Team (Vicksburg): 1-601-631-5847

EOC: 1-877-533-5224

Evacuating the District will be rare. The Commander must order an evacuation and issue an evacuation order. The Commander's and only the Commander's order can initiate payment of evacuation allowances. This order cannot exceed 180 days. **However**, the Commander may cancel at any time, for any reason. **DO NOT expect the evacuation order to last the full 180 days.** For most employees, the Hurricane Katrina evacuation lasted 84 days.

By the way, in the event of an evacuation, all employees who are not assigned work missions, must **personally** report by telephone to the Crisis Action Team (CAT), located at the Corps of Engineers Vicksburg, MS District **within three (3) calendar days of an ordered evacuation**. Failure to report within this time frame may result in the termination of all evacuation allowances (if authorized) or administrative pay. Additionally, employees must stay in constant contact with their supervisors while they are under evacuation orders.

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State or local government evacuation orders are to be followed. Unless the employee is directed to work during a storm, all state and local government evacuation orders are to be followed. A State and local government evacuation order **does not create** an entitlement to Evacuation Pay or Safe Haven Allowances.

Mandatory work crews

The term “work crews” is being used loosely here. In this situation, it means every employee or military individual directed to work pending, during and immediately after the arrival of a hurricane. It does not matter if the storm actually does not strike the New Orleans District, these folks must work. They don’t go home, they don’t make a precautionary evacuation; they work. Because they must work they will be issued limited evacuation orders. Why limited, because the orders only go to a select few—those that must work. These orders allow the employee’s family to seek a safe location to ride out a potential storm because the employee is not available to assist them if necessary. Employees that will get this set of orders are members of the Crisis Management Team, Crisis Action Team, Bunker Team, Lock and Structure Teams, Parish Liaison Personnel, etc. (if I missed a team).

So what are these employees entitled to? Pay for themselves, special tours of duty letters safe haven travel and per diem for their family. Two very important points: first, if the family residence is in a location that is not expected to be impacted by the hurricane, orders will not be issued and second, the family must evacuate. Both of the above points must occur or no safe haven travel or per diem is payable. For example, employee will work at a lock in the New Orleans area, but their family lives in Lake Charles Parish and Lake Charles Parish is not expected to be impacted, the family is not authorized to evacuate.

Safe haven entitlements will be based on the Commander’s authorized evacuation point. Safe haven travel claims will be settled under the policies set forth in the Joint Travel Regulations, Joint Federal Travel Regulations, Volume I, Chapter 6, part B (military), Joint Travel Regulations, Volume II, Chapter 12 and Appendix I, Part B (civilian), and MVN DR 500-3-1, Chapter 3).

What Are evacuation allowances?

Evacuation allowances are two separate items. The first is evacuation pay; the second is a safe haven per diem allowance. One very basic rule for both allowances: the employee/family must evacuate. Employees or family members who fail to evacuate or delay evacuation forfeit all evacuation allowances.

Evacuation Pay: There is only one level of evacuation pay—what the employee was making before an evacuation was declared. This can be a tricky allowance. If you are in an authorized paid leave status (sick or annual), you get paid, on any type of compensatory time – you get paid. Working part time – you get your part time pay. On leave without pay or serving a suspension – you don't get paid. Here's a very important rule with evacuation pay, **any employee may be directed back to work, at any time, to any location or any job regardless of their normal position while receiving evacuation pay. An employee directed back to work is to report in 2 calendar days.** There is no increase in pay if you are assigned a job that normally is a higher grade, likewise there is no decrease for lower graded work or assignment to part-time work. Failure to return to work may result in the immediate termination of **ALL** evacuation allowances as well as other possible disciplinary action.

Safe Haven: This is a straight forward allowance, it might seem confusing, but it really isn't.

For Civilians, safe haven is a travel and per diem allowance for the employee, and their relatives that live in the same household **AND** where the employee provides more than 50 percent of the relatives support. There is no age restriction or restriction on relationship. Simply, employee and relative may be paid safe haven.

For Military, safe haven is a travel and per diem allowance for the servicemember, and their dependents. Dependent status varies significantly, but one requirement exists, the dependency status is recognized and approved by the respective service (Army for us).

A few basic rules:

1. Official Safe Haven location will be published in the evacuation order by the Commander.

2. Employees/family members may evacuate to another location.
3. All reimbursements will be based on the per diem rate for official location or where the employee/family evacuated to – which ever is cheaper.
4. Relative must be in household and the employee must provide more than 50 percent of their support (military may differ).
5. Transportation to one safe haven evacuation location.
Recommended to be within 550 miles of the District! A second safe haven location may be authorized by the Commander, and only the Commander. Stringent requirements must be met to warrant approval of a second safe haven location. For Katrina, about 1,000 safe haven travel orders were issued, while only five follow-on (second) safe haven locations were approved.
6. One car will be reimbursed (additional cars require the Commander's approval and are based on family size (pets don't count)).
7. No lodging reimbursement when staying with friends and family.
8. Boarding with a person (unknown to you) that normally does not provide lodging commercially, ensure you get their name, address, phone number and social security number (IRS tax code, not my rule) to get reimbursed. We do not report the rental income to the IRS, but it is a part of your travel settlement.
9. **No additional reimbursements.** No pets, no in-and-about mileage, no phones, no laundry, no creative thinking, no...,

Per diem rules

1. First 30 days,
 - a. Employee and dependents 12 years and older, 100 percent of authorized per diem.
 - b. Dependents under 12 receive 50 percent of authorized per diem.
2. Days 31 to 180,

b. Employee and dependents 12 and older, 60 percent of the authorized per diem.

c. Dependents under 12 receive 30 percent of the amount prescribed in 1b above

3. Don't compare civilian and military entitlements. They are slightly different and there are advantages and disadvantages to each. Your claim will be settled based on the one that applies to you.